

ANDROID™ NETRUNNER™ THE CARD GAME

DEMOCRACY AND DOGMA

“The Eyes of the World are Upon You...” As national elections loom in the Indian Union, debate rages over granting clones full citizenship. A shadow war begins, and Jinteki will stop at nothing to make sure their most lucrative product remains just that: a product. With this cycle you can explore the largest megapolis in India, and expand your decks in novel ways with new consumer grade hardware and corporate alliances.

NEW SYMBOLS

The following new symbols appear on cards and stand for the four corporations:

 **HB:** Haas-Bioroid

 **NBN:** NBN

 **J:** Jinteki

 **W:** Weyland Consortium

CHINNAMASTA

Nero scans the dance floor with a growing sense of satisfaction. Amid pulsing strobe lights, dancers move to the throbbing beats. Lithe boys, slender girls, surgical neuters, g-mods of all colors, shapes, and sizes, all sway in silhouette against the color-changing holo show like jerking shadow puppets.

He reaches out a hand. Beside him on the plush couches in his roped-off booth—his throne room—his entourage cavorts, safe in the knowledge that here, of all places, they can be who they want to be. Half of the patrons of this club would be insulted, spat at, even attacked on the streets that bustled even now ten stories overhead. The great and the good of conservative India are blissfully unaware of what lies beneath their feet, and yet powerless to stop it even if they knew. Powerless to stop Nero, to transform him back to who he used to be.

A pretty girl in a silk sari strokes Nero's face and offers him an e-pipe. He waves the girl away, and she falls back onto the couch giggling. He wonders briefly what drug burns in her e-pipe and brain. She's a seeker, a young person who couldn't find herself in the roles society told her to play. Nero was a seeker himself in his youth; he'd wished he'd had a safe place like Chinnamasta Club to explore, to find himself.

Nero checks his console. His courier is running late. Every day and night Nero spends at the club is interrupted by a steady stream of informants entering like drones into a hornets' nest. Nero is the best infobroker there is. Since he left England in less than ideal circumstances, he's reinvented himself, been reborn. Nothing happens here without his knowledge. There isn't a citizen of note within Mumbad's teeming millions that Nero can't find dirt on, if he doesn't have it already.

When Zibik finally arrives, the scrawny clone is sweating and trembling. Something is wrong. With a nod, Nero has his guard unfasten the rope barrier and let Zibik through. The entourage shrinks back in disgust, as if the man's rankness could permeate their perfect mass of intertwined flesh and sequined designer labels. Nero invites Zibik to sit; the courier declines.

“You're late,” Nero says in his clipped accent cultivated by his years at Cheltenham. The man shrugs. “You have it?”

Zibik nods and takes a datastick from his breast pocket, holding it out to Nero.

Nero waves his hand over the stick, and checks his glowing dermal display. No virus, no trick—it's what he asked for, and more besides. This is the dirt on Akshara Sareen and her clone rights manifesto. The golden girl of Indian politics: altruistic, perfect. Nero knows no one is perfect. Sareen has secrets, and it looks like Zibik has found them.

Nero nods, and holds out a credstick while taking Zibik's datastick in the other. It amuses him, using a clone to betray the greatest hope for clone rights in India's history. It has a delicious irony to it. Like most of Jinteki's merchandise in Mumbad, however, Zibik isn't suitably equipped to figure this out.

“Ten thousand for services rendered, as agreed,” Nero says. It's nowhere near as much as this tip-off is worth. Zibik's masters will be pissed, but Nero will deal with them when the time comes.

For a moment too long they're linked, each with one hand on the datastick, the other on the credits. Zibik doesn't relinquish the data. He holds it firm in his strong, laborer's hands. “The price went up.”

Nero allows a scowl to flicker briefly across his smooth face. His followers shrink away a few inches further; they can smell trouble in the air. It isn't like clones to defy humans so outwardly—someone must be holding Zibik's leash tightly.

“This had better be good, Zibik.”

The clone says nothing but jerks his head towards the dance floor. Nero looks over Zibik's shoulder and spies two tall, well-dressed goons, one male, one female. Chiselled, Arabic features and tattooed necks. Prisec. How did they breach his security?

Nero and Zibik still hold the sticks.

“Whose pets are they, Zibik?”

“Haas-Bioroid.”

"You brought HB guns to my club?"

"I am sorry. They know what's on this stick, and they're twisting us hard. Jinteki is involved in something very bad, and HB wants it dealt with."

"Why don't they deal with it themselves?"

"Because they are... implicated. They don't need a whistleblower, Mr. Nero; they need an infobroker."

"Taking sides is bad for business."

"I have been told to inform you that if you do not disseminate this information appropriately, Haas-Bioroid will end you. Likewise if you implicate them in any way. They know about Oxford. They know who your father is."

"Careful, Zibik. Some secrets can get a clone killed." Nero squeezes the credstick twice, and it blinks in rhythm with his implant. "You get a *lakh*. Take it...or piss off out of my club."

Zibik considers for a second. "The full instructions are included."

Nero finally lets go of the credstick and is relieved when Zibik gives up the data. He hasn't felt like this for a long time—like he's dancing to someone else's tune. He doesn't like it.

Zibik tucks the credstick away. "No hard feelings, Mr. Nero. My boss can't mess with these guys any more than you can. You understand."

"Get out, Zibik." Nero rarely raises his voice, and he does so only a fraction, but it is enough. Zibik makes his exit under the glower of Nero's security, and the prisec toughs go with him. Nero watches them leave.

Maybe there's more to it. No saying those punks came from Haas at all. He'd have to dig around. He sure as hell won't allow himself to be played, but caution would be required.

Nero stands up abruptly and retreats behind the curtain to activate his mono-console. Data streams across the lens, and within a few seconds the decryptions are complete. His suspicions are confirmed: there's a lot to these files. He affords himself a little more ostentation.

With a sweeping gesture his monocle lights ghost-blue, and a dozen holoscreens project into the air. Nero's eyes dart greedily from doc to vidfeed, hospital security logs to closed circuit footage. He licks his lips. It's true, all of it—the cloning, the braintaping, the murder. If this was made public...

But that's not how this will go down—there's no profit in simple exposure, and too much to lose. Nero holds up a hand and clenches his fist. The virts zip out of the air and back into the lens. He runs a wider search—tracking down Sareen's key contacts, affiliates, enemies, and allies. He needs to identify who should get first refusal on this information—who will pay. There'll be more than one candidate, of course, but that's

not Nero's problem—he wants to pass this along as quickly as possible. For a lesser infobroker, this search would take all night. But Nero is connected better than most. He finds his buyers, three of them, and smiles.

When he disconnects, Nero looks up at the large stone fountain that stands in the center of his club—a statue of Chinnamasta, the goddess who gives Nero's den its name. More than that; she feeds Nero's philosophy; she brings him luck. She stood here long before Nero found this cellar, and he figures she'll be there long after he's gone. Life-giver and life-taker, sensual and yet in control. Dangerous. Naked, red, headless—she holds her own head in one hand, and the scimitar that took it in the other. Destroying herself to create herself; Nero can relate. She stands upon the oiled bodies of lovers while her servants wait eagerly around her, drinking the blood that gushes from her severed neck. Colored water, naturally, but the effect is satisfying. He slinks through the crowd and reaches out to touch the carved lotus flower that lies between Chinnamasta's breasts, before taking his hand away, staring amusedly at his red-stained fingers.

By the time he's through, he'll be a few *crore* richer and virtually untouchable. Haas-Bioroid would rue the day they threatened him. But there'll be no blood on his hands. This is the closest he'll ever come to that.

CREDITS

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